

2005 Crime and Safety Report

Europe - France

May 12 2005

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

France is a relatively safe country. The majority of crime directed against foreign visitors, including Americans, involves pickpocketing and larceny. Visitors to congested tourist sites like museums, monuments, train stations, airports and subways should be particularly alert to their surroundings. Crimes against visitors are generally non-violent crimes of opportunity unless the victim detects the theft and physical confrontation occurs.

Over the past year there has also been an increase in harassment and violence against Christian missionaries working in or near predominately Muslim neighborhoods of the major cities. The missionaries' strict dress code and insistence on wearing nametags with their church affiliation clearly noted, significantly raises their profile and likelihood of being targeted for harassment or violence. However, this harassment has not been extended beyond this specific group.

Corsican separatists also continue their anti-government campaign by targeting French government buildings in Corsica. Although these acts seldom occur and do not target Americans, proximity to one of these attacks could potentially result in unintended casualties.

Paris

Crime in Paris is similar to most large cities, but violent crime is uncommon in the heart of the city. Pickpockets are active on the rail link (RER) from Charles de Gaulle airport to downtown Paris and on the number one metro (subway) line that cuts across the city center east to west servicing many of the major tourist sites. A common scheme is for one thief to distract the tourist with questions or disturbance while an accomplice picks pockets, a backpack or purse. Thieves often time their crime to coincide with the closing of the automatic doors on the metro, leaving the victim secured on the departing train. Many thefts also occur at the major department stores (Galleries Lafayette, Printemps, and Samaritaine) where tourists leave wallets, passports and credit cards on cashier counters during transactions.

Popular tourist sites are also popular hunting grounds for thieves who favor congested areas to mask their

activities. The crowded elevators at the Eiffel Tower, escalators at museums and the area around the Sacre Coeur church in Montmartre are all favored by pickpockets and snatch and run thieves. The area around the famous Moulin Rouge is known as Pigalle and best avoided after dark unless with a tour group headed for a show. Pigalle is an adult entertainment area known for prostitutes, sex shows and drugs. Unsuspecting tourists often run up exorbitant bar bills and are forced to pay before being permitted to leave.

Strasbourg

Strasbourg's historic center enjoys a fairly low serious crime rate when compared to its environs. Pickpockets and snatch and run thieves tend to concentrate their efforts in the Petite France historic district popular with visitors. Vehicle arson has come into vogue here, with an unofficial annual New Years Eve competition claiming roughly two dozen vehicles a year. While some of these arsons are acts of insurance fraud, others are purely vandalism.

Marseille

Pickpockets in the Old Port area, occasional thefts from cars stopped at red lights and thefts from hotel rooms are the most common problems in Marseille. Car doors should be kept locked and windows should be rolled up at all times to prevent snatch and grab incidents. Valuables should be held closely when visiting tourist sites. Break-ins of parked cars to steal stereos, mobile phones or other valuables are also fairly frequent.

Prior to travel to France it is recommended that visitors check the United States Department of State website for updated security advisories at [HTTP://TRAVEL.STATE.GOV](http://travel.state.gov).

Political Violence

French authorities arrested numerous terrorist suspects throughout 2004 and continue to aggressively conduct anti-terrorist operations. The terrorist threat in France primarily stems from radical Islamists and Corsican separatists. The Corsicans traditionally have targeted official French government buildings in Corsica, but they have attacked some facilities around the southern city of Nice in the past. French authorities responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks by establishing a threat condition known as VIGIPRATE RENFORCE. This requires French law enforcement and intelligence agencies to operate at various elevated levels depending on the perceived threat. This response remains in effect at the time of this writing; it has proven to be an effective deterrent to terrorism and common crime as well. Visitors to France

may see evidence of VIGIPRATE at major landmarks, train stations and airports where additional security personnel are posted.

Despite a tradition of strikes and mass demonstrations, violent civil disorder is rare in France. However, visitors are encouraged to stay clear of demonstrations. Police intervention in demonstrations could be sudden and catch the unwary off guard. In addition, the congestion caused by large demonstrations could cause major inconveniences for a visitor on a tight schedule.

Post-Specific Concerns

A summer heat wave in 2003 reportedly caused over 15,000 heat related deaths. (Air conditioning is not common household commodity southern France). Also, summer wildfires can disrupt vacations in Provence and along the Cote d'Azur. These fires burn off important vegetation from the hillsides and, if followed by a wet winter, can cause massive mudslides and flooding. Public transportation is generally safe, medical treatment comparable to other western countries, and building safety is generally equal to the United States.

Police Response

The Minister of interior controls the national police (civilian force of approximately one hundred eighteen thousand persons responsible for all urban areas with more than ten thousand people) and operational control of the military gendarmerie (approximately ninety thousand responsible for non-urban areas). These two separate organizations and the Domestic Intelligence Service (DST) comprise the policing system in France. These services are professional, competent, and active in fighting crime and violence to maintain overall state security. The French parliament passed a law in 2003 which expanded police powers to enhance their abilities to counter threats posed by terrorism and organized crime.

For non-emergency assistance, visitors should go to the nearest police station (Commisariat) in order to file an official report. There is a Commisariat in each of the twenty Arrondissements (neighborhoods) of Paris. In an emergency, calling 118 on a mobile phone or 17 on a hard line phone will put the caller in touch with the emergency services desk. Non-French speakers may experience a delay while an English speaker is located. Under French law photographic identification should be carried at all times.

Medical Emergency

Medical facilities are comparable to that found in the United States. Consult the local phone book for the nearest medical facility. Dial 15 on a hard line telephone for emergency medical response.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

- Common sense security precautions will help a visitor enjoy a trouble-free stay; most problems can be avoided simply by paying attention to one's surroundings and avoiding unsavory areas.
- Only carry items that are essential. The carrying of large amounts of cash and high-value jewelry should be avoided. Valuables should be kept out of sight, and in places difficult for thieves to reach, such as internal coat pockets or in pouches hung around the neck or inside clothes. Shoulder bags and wallets in hip pockets are an invitation to a thief.
- Crowded elevators and escalators at tourist sites and crowded metro cars should raise awareness levels. When possible take a seat or stand against a wall to deter pickpockets.
- Do not leave valuables in hotel rooms.
- If a thief is caught in the act, be aware that thieves often operate in groups and will come to each others aid if confronted. A simple pickpocketing could turn into an assault (or worse) if an attempt is made to capture the thief. The best response would be to verbally alert both the thief and by-standers that you are aware of his/her activity. With the thief detected and others aware, the thief will most likely flee and continue operating elsewhere.
- Adult entertainment districts such as Paris' Pigalle and St. Denis are areas to be avoided, particularly at night. Many nightclubs in these areas engage in very aggressive marketing, charging exorbitant rates for drinks. Hidden charges of five hundred to six hundred Euros for drinks are not uncommon, and there have been reports of threats to coerce customers into paying these charges by physically preventing customers from leaving until the tab is settled. Additionally, public parks should be avoided after dark, as they are often a haven for drug dealers and prostitutes.

For Further Information

The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Paris, Office of American Services, is located at 2 Rue Florentin, 75001 Paris (nearest to Place de la Concorde). International telephone number 33.1.43.12.22.22 or in France 01.43.12.22.22., fax 01.42.61.61.40.

The Consulate General in Marseille is located at Place Varian Fry, 13086 Marseille. The telephone number calling from inside France is 04.91.54.92.00, Consular Section extension 304. The fax number is 04.91.55.09.47.

The Consulate General in Strasbourg is located at 15 Avenue d'Alsace, 67082 Strasbourg Cedex. The telephone number calling from inside France is 03.88.35.31.04. The fax number is 03.88.24.06.95. The Consulate General in Strasbourg does not produce passports on site. American citizens in this area whose passports are lost or stolen and who have urgent travel needs should contact the U.S. Embassy in Paris for assistance.

American Presence Post Bordeaux, 10 Place de la Bourse B.P. 77, 33025 Bordeaux Cedex. The telephone number calling from inside France is 05.56.48.63.80.

American Presence Post Lille, 107 Rue Royale, 59800 Lille. Telephone number calling from inside France is 03.20.78.29.60.

American Presence Post Lyon, 16 Rue de la Republique, 68289 Lyon Cedex 02. The telephone number calling from inside France is 04.78.38.36. .88.

American Consular Agency Nice, 7 Avenue Gustave V, 06000 Nice. The telephone number calling from inside France is 04.93.88.89.55.

American Presence Posts Rennes, 30 Quay Dugay-Trouin, 35000 Rennes. The telephone number calling from inside France is 02.23.44.09.60.

American Presence Post Toulouse, 25 Allee Jean-Jaures, 31000 Toulouse. The telephone number calling from inside France is 05.34.41.36.50.